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ABSTRACT

This position paper examines educational policies, school effectiveness, and responses to broader public policy concerns in the context of the special needs of early adolescence. The policy issues under consideration derive from a statewide comprehensive survey of educational trends in the middle grades and are addressed in a statewide Regents Action Plan. Topics related to educational policy include the following: (1) characteristics of adolescence that affect school organization and curriculum; (2) organizational issues in middle schooling; (3) instructional issues in middle schooling; (4) educational reform and the middle grades; (5) gifted adolescents; (6) certification and preparation for teachers of young adolescents; and (7) guidance and support services. The last section addresses the out-of-school problems of adolescents, at home and in the community, and offers suggestions for ways that schools and community services can collaborate to provide developmental support for young adolescents. Appended are state program requirements for students in grades 7 and 8 and an initial summary of findings from the New York State School Boards Association's 1986 survey on educational trends in the middle grades. A summary of recommendations is included as a preface. (TE)

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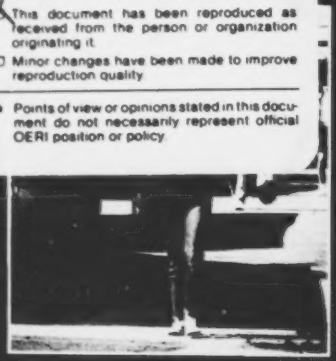

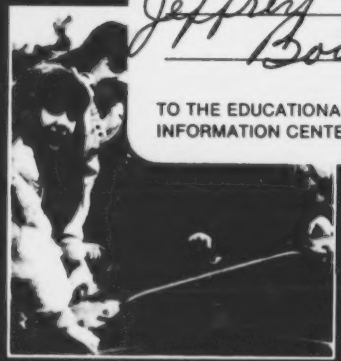

Meeting in the Middle

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Meeting in the Middle

Directions in Schooling for Young Adolescents

A Position Paper of the
NEW YORK STATE
SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

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Summary of Recommendations

- Middle schooling reform must be based on an understanding of the educational implications of early adolescence and the features of successful middle schools.
- Programs in the middle grades should respond to the developmental needs of adolescence.
- To create successful middle school programs, we should borrow from what we know about effective schools in general.
- Districts should develop and adopt policies that clearly state educational goals and philosophy for the middle grades.
- Educational goal setting for the middle grades must include objectives specific to adolescent needs and expectations for the middle grade experience in the district.
- Attention must be paid at the state and local levels, as well as by the research community, to the *transition* into and out of the middle grades.
- Instructional requirements placed on districts and students through regulations should be carefully reviewed for their impact on individual school organization and the relationships among schools within the district's organization.
- Any change in organization of the middle grades should be communicated in concise and concrete terms to staff, parents and students.
- Decisions for change in organization of the middle schools should be consistent with district and school goals and address the individual differences among adolescent learners.
- A district's philosophy of middle school should incorporate principles of instruction based on research findings about the unique needs of adolescents.
- Alternative organizational techniques, including interdisciplinary team teaching, should be explored to facilitate easier transitions in the middle grades, and encourage personalized observation and communication among teachers.
- Programs should be organized in combinations of small and large blocks of time to accommodate interdisciplinary approaches and integrated learning experiences.
- Organizational structures should allow for continuous instructional evaluation and stress a developmental approach to learning.
- Reporting systems of student progress should be personalized within a supportive environment.
- Student evaluation should be diagnostic *and* prescriptive. Resources for help should be available within the school or found with help of the school.
- Special combinations of departmentalized and self-contained classrooms should be explored.
- To preserve organizational and instructional innovation in the middle grades, consideration should be given to alternative regulatory structures that reflect to a greater extent attention to instructional transitions than the current Part 100 of the Commissioner of Education's Regulations.
- Efforts should be made to arrive at a statewide consensus on goals of middle schooling.
- The lack of flexibility in course scheduling in grades seven and eight, particularly where remediation is concerned, should be the major point for reconsideration in Part 100.

- In evaluating schools' effectiveness, consideration at the state level should include efforts by districts to promote developmental growth through nonrequired activity offerings.
- There must be greater acknowledgement of innovative programs for gifted adolescents, including adequate state funding to support programs and identification efforts.
- Teachers of young adolescents should be certified within a flexible framework, which emphasizes the special needs of adolescence.
- Before an overly broad area of certification is adopted by regulation, alternatives (such as N-3 and 4-8) should be explored with flexibility coming from inservice programs and certification amendments.
- Any changes in current certification methods should be compatible with tenure provisions, seniority rights and demands created by implementation of the Regents Action Plan.
- Considering the load of guidance counselors, outlets for career counseling, support services, and agency networking must be sought, supported by funding that allows for local discretion.
- Schools and communities should cooperate in assessing what is available for adolescents, what adolescents may contribute to the community, and how to go about bringing youth and community together.
- Students themselves should be encouraged to be a part of the planning process and to articulate their needs for employment, after-school activities, and health-related services.
- Schools for adolescents must make direct efforts to gain community support. School policies should reflect openness to community concerns and support a mechanism in place to handle them.
- Schools for adolescents should have in place an effective reporting and feedback process with parents.
- Educational policymakers should create new opportunities for dialogue, while reassessing services to adolescents and seeking to eliminate program conflicts and overlaps.

Introduction

In 1984, the New York State Board of Regents adopted an action plan to elevate elementary and secondary school standards. The reforms proposed for grades seven and eight prompted the State School Boards Association to conduct a statewide survey of school officials regarding their opinions on possible scheduling and staffing problems. Despite the warning signals found in this field research, the Board of Regents opted to make few changes in its plans for junior high requirements (Appendix A provides a copy of pertinent Commissioner's Regulations for reference). The Regents, however, did promise to conduct a continuing evaluation of the Action Plan's implementation.

The New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA) is committed to help state level education authorities evaluate changes for the middle grades. School boards realize that middle schooling reform can work only if educational implications of early adolescence and the features of successful middle schools are understood fully. Consequently, NYSSBA decided to develop a complete policy research profile of middle schooling and a position paper based on that research to assist both local school boards and state level policymakers.

Our research builds upon a statewide comprehensive survey of educational trends in the middle grades. The goals of NYSSBA's 1986 survey were:

- —to assess the impact of the Regents Action Plan and related educational reforms on middle schooling;
- —to determine how recent reforms may have affected scheduling and special services in the middle grades;
- —to gain information about the links between the community and adolescents; and
- —to find out how schools serving adolescents provide for their social and emotional needs.

A summary of survey results may be found in Appendix A.

In the following paper, issues that concern school boards will be discussed. These include the characteristics of adolescence that have an impact upon school organization and curriculum, adolescent pregnancy, suicide and school-home-community links. This document reflects the views of the New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA) Board of Directors. The educational community is invited to consider NYSSBA's comments and combine efforts to enrich and improve our programs for early adolescents.

Clearly, the problems of adolescents are diverse and cut across all socioeconomic levels. The problems converge in school.

An Agenda

Alarming statistics call for confronting the educational issues of adolescence with an agenda of new research, policy, and practice. In the United States there are one million runaways, aged 12 to 14, each year. It is feared that numbers of "throwaways," those asked to leave by parents or guardians, are comparable. One in four babies is born to a teen mother. One in ten adolescents has contemplated suicide, and 5,000 commit it each year. One in nine will be involved with the juvenile justice system before or during adolescence. According to the Quest National Center Institute on early adolescence, of the 30 percent of high school seniors who admittedly have an alcohol problem, the average age given for initial consumption of alcohol was 11 to 11½ years old. In recent years there has been an increase in all types of pathological behavior among adolescents. The incidence of homicide, suicide and out of wedlock births has increased from 200 to 400 percent, according to a 1982 survey based on U.S. government statistics. (Shapiro and Wynne, 1982) As Joseph Adelson suggests in *Inventing Adolescence* (1986), syndromes such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia are now "epidemic among upper-middle-class adolescent girls."

Clearly, the problems of adolescents are diverse and cut across all socioeconomic levels. The problems converge in school. It is in the context of schools, their programs and their responses to the special needs of *early* adolescence that this paper will examine adolescent development, school effectiveness and responses to public policy concerns beyond the educational program.

Early or young adolescents, as defined in this paper, include students ranging from those completing elementary school to those beginning high school. The term "middle schooling" refers to the manner of instruction and school organization adopted for the education of young adolescents, deriving its character from the educational goals, district organization, and instructional objectives put forth by the local school board.

Adolescent Development and the Structure of Middle Schooling

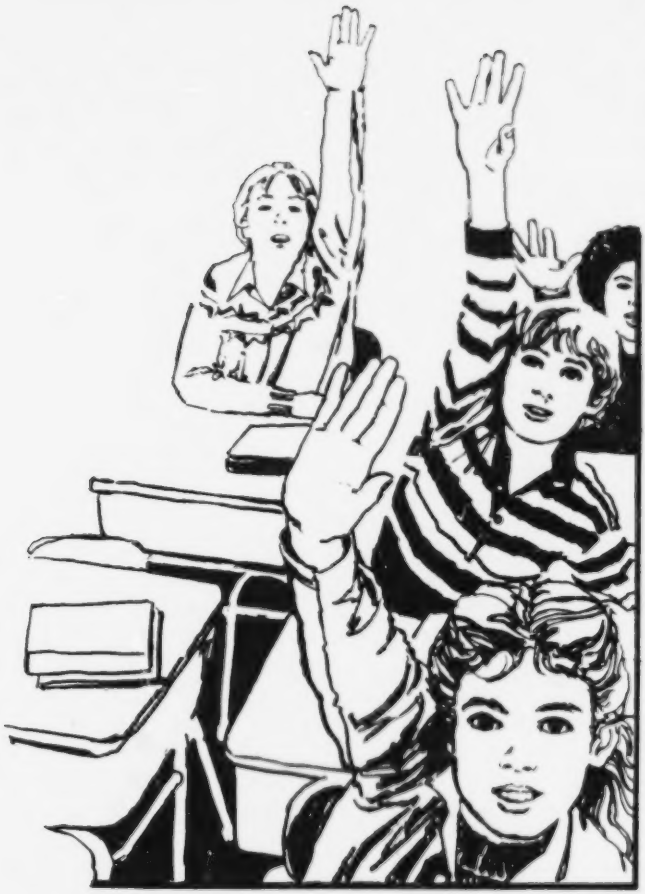
Adolescent behavior has been depicted in a variety of ways throughout art and literature: from Shakespeare's Juliet, to the comedic recollections of adolescence in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Broadway's "Bye-Bye Birdie." All of these images share the common premise that adolescence is a time of change, unique in its physical and social processes. Its "fundamental task is clear and stable self-identification," as stated in *The Vanishing Adolescent.* (Friedenberg, 1959)

Social convention views adolescence in chronological and legalistic terms. Child labor laws, compulsory education laws and the juvenile justice system give us legal cues to separate childhood from adulthood. This is contrary to viewing adolescence as a period of cognitive, biological and social growth.

Cognitively, the adolescent, who as a child learned to apply logical thought to concrete problems must learn how to apply logic to abstract problems and to weigh consequences not immediately apparent. Physically, there is change in height and weight, development of secondary sex characteristics and overall growth. Socially, there is a marked increase in the desire for autonomy, the importance of the peer group in place of adults, and a search for a sense of values and morality sparked by their own questioning. This may account for varying rates of change in each developmental stage and plateaus where new cognitive abilities are acquired more slowly as the brain adjusts to its own changes.

Programs for adolescents are defined by the programs that precede and follow them. Unlike the wealth of research that supports the development of early childhood programs, educational programs for adolescents primarily borrow structure and resources from established secondary programs.

Why has this occurred? One possible reason is that it is easier to control the environment of very young children for research purposes than it is for adolescents. Yet, these two groups have much in common. There are two major growth spurts in the human life cycle which are characterized by changes in physical, intellectual and emotional/social development. These occur from birth to three and approximately from ages 10 to 15. In addition, heightened self-awareness pervades both personalities. Those in the 10 to 15 year age group can be found scattered in a variety of educational settings, depending on whether they are viewed as older "elementary" students or younger "secondary" ones. In New York state, more than 60 different middle grade configurations are used.



The notion that decisions about grouping middle grades may be made for reasons associated with facility maintenance rather than educational reasons is alarming. As we are learning with early childhood programs, schools can and should respond to developmental needs. The complexity of those needs poses special problems. The adolescent is a child in flux, coping not only with maturing cognitively, biologically, and socially, but with the onset of these changes coming at different rates.

Early adolescence presents extraordinary challenges to the educational community. The middle school concept recognizes the need for a unique curriculum planning approach. Due to economics and enrollment patterns, a district may not house middle grades separately, nor should it be required to do so. However, a healthy learning environment can be created for *middle schooling* by linking school organization and curriculum.

Organizational Issues in Middle Schooling

Because of our failure to research adequately the . . . changes that occur during early adolescence we have been hampered in designing effective educational programs for young adolescents. Our absence of knowledge and our failure to utilize the knowledge we have acquired have had a profound impact on our educational system.

Joan Lipsitz
Growing Up Forgotten, 1980

Joan Lipsitz' words sum up the reasons for concern about middle schooling issues. The temptation remains to accommodate the transitional school years where it is most practical; where there is a building or sufficient numbers of classrooms left after the elementary and high school students are set. Consequently, programs often fit poorly together.

Beginning in the early 1960s, a major research effort began, promoting a middle school concept as opposed to the already existing junior high concept. Concern was aroused by new evidence that children matured earlier than previously thought and that close ties to high schools were, in fact, inappropriate. The outcome was a fresh look at adolescence in the research world. Three concerns still remain at the center of the controversy: (1) that programs should be geared to the needs and interests of early adolescents, (2) that the entire educational system should be reorganized to promote continuity, and (3) that reforms in instruction and curriculum should reflect program continuity. (Alexander, 1969)

There are special problems in the transition to middle grades. At the same point students begin to change emotionally and physically, they are presented with new learning environments. In most instances, the self-contained classroom is gone, replaced by departmentalized classrooms or some form of team teaching. The burden of responsibility is on the student to cope with individual schedules, an unfamiliar physical plant, and to find time and ways to establish relationships with teachers and peers. These changes at school only add to concerns about program continuity.

To create successful middle school programs, we should borrow from what we know about effective schools in general. Effective schools as defined by current researchers can educate students from all backgrounds and close the gap between social background and school performance. Researchers and educational practitioners agree on a basic set of effective school characteristics: (1) strong instructional leadership at the school level; (2) clear goals and high expecta-

tions for all students; (3) parental and community support; (4) a climate of order and safety; and (5) strong links between curriculum and organization.

The current wealth of school improvement efforts focuses on these criteria. However, even here, middle schooling is neglected since most effective schools research has been based on elementary or high school level subjects. One notable exception is the work at the Center for Early Adolescence at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Lipsitz's *Successful Schools for Young Adolescents* (1984) makes a distinction between effective and successful schools. Successful schools "meet more than minimal expectations." The following criteria serve as a framework verified by Lipsitz's research for identifying successful middle grade schools:

- They measure up to a set of "threshold" criteria related to safety, comportment and achievement.
- They respond appropriately to the developmental levels of students.
- They pursue competence in learning.
- They have won acceptance within the context of the local community and its expectations.
- They function well in response to or despite unresolved national policy issues.

In another study underwritten by the Carnegie Corporation and Greater New York Foundation for the Advocates for Children of New York, Inc., during 1984-85, four effective schools in New York City were identified. Criteria for selection by the research team mandated that schools serve a predominantly low-income and minority (70 percent) student population, have Chapter I status, 50 percent free-lunch eligibility for its student body, attendance above the citywide average for middle schools, and serve primarily children from its immediate neighborhood.

The observations and outcomes of these studies have far-reaching implications for school districts. Grade configurations appear to have little to do with the effectiveness of middle school programs. The more important factor is how the grades, students and teachers are organized or arranged in various ways within a given school. The Advocates for Children study cited four schools representing four different configurations 7-9, 5-8, 7-8, and 6-8. Each maintains its own set of goals and possesses a unique administrative style and school climate. The principal plays a strong, though different role in each school. In common, however, they possess high visibility and are known to be fair, goal oriented, and able to win community support.

The New York State School Boards Association conducted a survey on educational trends in the middle grades during the spring of 1986. Completed surveys were returned by 54 percent (382) of dis-

tricts queried. Regarding school configurations, the survey revealed that 29 percent of responding districts use a 7 through 12 setup and 20 percent use a 6 through 8 plan. The remaining 51 percent combines 5-8, 7-8, 7-9, and K-12 configurations. This variety indicates a need for districts to use the resources at their disposal. These resources should be used in ways consistent with the educational philosophy developed for the district's middle grades and adolescents. The philosophy should include goals and objectives specific to adolescent needs and clearly define expectations for the middle grade experience in the district.

Particular attention must be paid to the transition into and out of the middle grades. Research should be directed to instructional and developmental implications of alternative grade groupings. Initial State Education Department evaluations of the Regents Action Plan state that, due to implementation dates and the lack of a reporting mechanism for the middle grades, it is premature to draw conclusions about impact. However, the NYSSBA survey addressed middle grades specifically and does identify emerging organizational concerns.

Nearly 70 percent of surveyed districts were experiencing scheduling difficulties due to acceleration, i.e., the placement of eighth graders into ninth grade level courses. One in five ended up with enlarged ninth grades as a direct result of the requirement. Is this developmentally appropriate for the students involved?

Eighth graders may be moved into a high school building to take accelerated academic courses; however, the social and emotional needs of the student may be poorly met. Discipline and adjustment problems may result in New York state, as they have, for example, in Florida where new course requirements for the middle grades have compelled districts to make organizational changes. Instructional requirements placed on districts and students should be carefully viewed for their impact on individual school organization *and* on the relationships among schools within the district organization.

In addition, any change in grade organization of the middle grades should be communicated in concise and concrete terms to staff, parents and students. The change should relate to the desired outcomes, i.e., making better use of resources for greater instructional opportunities, or creating an environment that is more responsive to the needs of adolescents.

In any case, the decisions for change in organization should be consistent with district and school goals and address the massive individuality and diversity among adolescent learners.

Instructional Issues in Middle Schooling

Schools for adolescents face an enormous challenge: to develop and implement an educational program that conforms to prescribed regulations within a given physical setting for an age group characterized by profound individual differences. The variety of learning styles and adolescents' disposition toward learning affects all aspects of the school program, from grouping for instruction to scheduling and extracurricular offerings. In *Adapting Instruction to Individual Differences*, Wang and Walberg (1985) observe that when people learn, they are influenced by a variety of factors including, environment, gender, social and economic status, ethnicity, and self-concept. However, learners do not "bring their unique characteristics singly to bear on teaching and learning. . . ." (Gordon, DeStefano, and Shipman, 1984) During adolescence, when some of these factors are themselves unstable, customized and inflexible instructional programs fall short.

Then what should a district's philosophy of middle school look like? Above all, the program should incorporate principles of instruction based on solid empirical findings about the unique needs of adolescents. For example, the transition from the self-contained elementary classroom to total departmentalization of instruction, if that is chosen, can be smoothed through organizational techniques. "Houses" and team teaching, where students belong to and can identify with a smaller unit and be known by a group of teachers, are decisions that reflect recognition of adolescent problems.

Variations can be found throughout New York state that organize the instructional program to meet educational and developmental challenges. The New York State Middle School Association 1986 Directory shows this diversity. In the predominantly rural central school districts of Sidney and Goshen, there are two distinct adaptations. Goshen uses an interdisciplinary team teaching approach, including one in each subject of English, math, reading, science and social studies for every 115 to 120 students per grade level (6-8). Sidney uses two teams per grade level (6-8), consisting of science, math, English, social studies, and reading in one, and music, art, technology, and home and career teachers in the other. Catskill Middle School, grades six through eight, uses the interdisciplinary team in yet another way. In grade six, the team works with students grouped by ability. Departmentalization is used in grades seven and eight only. To give help to those experiencing difficulties, Project Reach, an alternative education program is available.

The variety of learning styles and adolescents' disposition toward learning affects all aspects of the program, from grouping for instruction to scheduling and extracurricular offerings.

These three distinct programs in rural New York attest to the innovative spirit of boards and middle school educators. More variations exist among suburban and city schools, such as the Farnsworth Middle School in the Guilderland Central School District. Here, three "houses" give students a smaller school community with which to identify within the school.

The emphasis is on transition, moving from primarily self-contained classrooms in grade five to two-person teacher teams in grade six, and four-person teams in grades seven and eight.

Throughout these programs are common threads of instructional philosophy, which school boards should consider:

- Instruction is personalized through teacher observation and communication among teams.
- Programs are organized in combinations of small and large blocks of time to accommodate interdisciplinary approaches and integrated learning experiences.
- The structures allow for continuous instructional evaluation of the student and stress a developmental approach to learning.
- The reporting systems of student progress are personalized within a supportive environment.
- Evaluation is diagnostic and prescriptive. Resources for help are found by/within the school itself.
- Special combinations of departmentalized and self-contained classrooms exist.

It is apparent that where educating adolescents is concerned, flexibility for responsive programming is crucial. It is at this juncture that we must consider state level reforms and their impact on middle schooling.

Educational Reform and the Middle Grades

The Regents Action Plan and Part 100 of the Commissioner's Regulations (see Appendix A) serve as the framework for educational reform in New York state. Curriculum requirements are addressed of grade levels K through 6, grades 7 and 8, and grades 9 through 12. The NYSSBA survey on educational trends in the middle grades obtained information on the initial impact of the Regents Action Plan after its first full year of implementation.* Although full implementation will not occur for several years, the impact on students' schedules and course offerings is apparent. In addition, this information may foreshadow potential inconsistencies between the way we deliver educational services to adolescents and what we know is developmentally appropriate.

Regulatory Structure

As noted previously, only 15 percent of responding districts house grades 7 and 8 in a separate facility. Yet the regulations do isolate these grades. The current rigid structure of the seventh and eighth grade regulations may hamper district innovation and work against overall goals for middle schooling. District options to offer courses, share facilities and create adequate environments for adolescent transition can be reduced, depending upon where the grades are housed. This can be seen in the new, technology education and home and career skills courses. Twenty-three percent of responding districts offer technology education and thirty percent offer home and career skills in grade six. In those districts where this is not possible due to housing configurations and other district resources, there is less opportunity for gradual transition and student schedules are additionally burdened by necessity.

We can learn from similar accountability measures applied in Florida, one of the first states to enact reform legislation. Three pieces of legislation that tighten achievement requirements in grades K through 3, 9 through 12, and 4 through 8 have had a heavy impact on the middle grades. The PRIME (Progress in Middle Childhood Education) bill has received the least funding. It tightens up middle grade requirements and views middle school curriculum as a downward extension of high school. Higher retention rates in elementary grades have resulted in older middle school students. Schools have eliminated many effective programs, team teaching and interdisciplinary

* Summary of results can be found in Appendix B.

instruction to allow more preparation for the new college-bound high school curriculum. To preserve organizational and instructional innovation in the middle grades, further consideration should be given to alternative regulatory structures that reflect attention to transitions and consensus on the goals of middle schooling.

Remediation

Findings regarding remediation prompt questions about the appropriateness of new course requirements. In one year there has been an estimated ten percent jump in the number of students needing a unit of study reduced to accommodate remediation in grades seven and eight. The areas most frequently reduced reflect the newest requirements, including foreign language study.

Simultaneously, the number of students receiving remediation remains constant. We can infer that students are spending *more time* in remedial instruction, necessitating a reduction of a unit of study. This situation signals a potential inconsistency among the individual academic goals of the Regents Action Plan. If one in six students must seek a unit of study reduction, we have to question the current rigid scheduling. It is alarming that remedial students with a reduction in foreign language will be at a distinct disadvantage when the foreign language requirement confronts them in high school. The "remedy" in grade seven could very well set these students up for failure later on. The lack of flexibility in scheduling, noted to be the greatest problem in all curriculum areas surveyed, should be viewed as the major point for reconsideration in the regulations.

Electives and Extracurricular Activities

An important aspect of adolescent growth is self-conceptualization, seeking one's identity. Self-discovery is advanced by the availability of electives and extracurricular activities. The survey found that two out of three responding districts would not eliminate courses to implement the Regents Action Plan. This represents a responsiveness to locally defined adolescent needs. However, for districts who said they have or will cut back electives as a direct result of the Regents Action Plan, those most frequently marked for elimination were courses in fundamental skills—developmental reading, writing, and study skills.

The variety of extracurricular activities and the tenacity with which districts hold on to them is a very positive note. Virtually no districts planned elimination of activities. Increased student participation was noted in many areas, particularly in musical ensembles (36 percent) and sports (26 percent). This may be due to schools moving these activities to after school to make room in daily schedules. The remedial student who has music reduced as a unit of study and cannot

remain after school, again loses out. The regulation requiring a credit of music and the value of arts education as learning tools for adolescents with academic difficulties are both undermined. This development merits reevaluation.

In the effective schools we have discussed, we see strong elective programs. Junior High School 56 in Brooklyn is well-known for its music program. The Otto Shortell Middle School in the Oneida City School District takes pride in its range of activities, including independent studies, artists-in-residence and the "Poet in the Schools" program. In evaluating schools' effectiveness, consideration at the state level should include efforts to promote developmental growth through non-required activity offerings.

Gifted Adolescents

The Regents Action Plan acknowledges academically talented adolescents by requiring that acceleration be made available to eighth graders in four subject areas. The NYSSBA survey revealed that the average proportion of eighth graders who will participate in one or more accelerated courses in 1986-87 is 17 percent. The criteria most used to select students for participation are teacher referral, grade average, standardized test scores and parental request. Sixty-nine percent of school districts said they would experience scheduling difficulties. Eleven percent predicted increased transportation costs, 25 percent, additional staff costs and 38 percent, increased costs for equipment and materials.

These efforts by districts to comply with the Regents Action Plan are misleading, however. The plan itself does not acknowledge gifted education and acceleration should not be confused with it. This is evident in the schools that do provide gifted programs in addition to acceleration. These programs take a variety of forms. Eagle Hill Middle School in the Fayetteville-Manlius district uses the Gifted and Talented Pull-out Program in grades five through eight. Jamesville-DeWitt Central also uses this concept. James Wilson Young Junior High School in the Bayport-Blue Point School District concentrates its gifted program in the sixth grade. Whatever its form, these programs provide flexibility and offer combinations of exploratory and highly structured activities. In viewing current regulations, there must be greater recognition of innovative types of gifted programs, along with adequate state funding to support variations in the middle grades, where talents are at their greatest risk of going unnoticed.

Certification and Preparation for Teachers of Young Adolescents

Teacher certification categories and requirements have been reorganized recently in New York state. In this process, reformers have not attended to the fit between unique needs of *adolescents* and the preparation of their teachers. Adolescence is possibly the most dramatic period of child growth. Early adolescence in particular is a crucial period for success or failure in schooling. If teachers are to be prepared to deal with the many changes and barriers to learning that face adolescents, they should be certified within a somewhat flexible framework that recognizes the child's development.

More confusion stems from a comparison of regulations on student requirements and the certification for requirements for their teachers. Commissioner's Regulations to implement the Regents Action

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If teachers are to be prepared to deal with the many changes and barriers to learning that face adolescents, they should be certified within a somewhat flexible framework that recognizes the child's development.

Plan assume a K-6, 7-8, and 9-12 grade organization for public education. This does not correspond with teacher certification requirements which fit an N-6 and 7-12 pattern. Neither of these fully accounts for the flexibility needed to make public school curriculum and instruction accommodate the readiness of children to learn and the stages of their development. The proposed N-8/9-12 ideas do reflect the transitional needs of both student and teacher to a greater extent; however, it may be too much to expect a beginning teacher to fully understand the needs of preschool all the way through adolescence. Before an overly broad area of certification is adopted by regulation, conveniently overlapping alternatives should be explored—for example, N-5, and 4-8, with built-in flexibility coming from inservice programs or certification amendments to accommodate a variety of middle schooling structures.

Any changes should be compatible with current tenure provisions, seniority rights, and demands created by implementation of the Regents Action Plan.

Guidance and Support Services

The New York State School Boards Association survey revealed that scheduling, communicating with parents and dealing with crises are viewed as the most important and time-consuming duties of a counselor. The average ratio of counselors to 7th and 8th grade students in reporting districts was 1 to 166. The range of responses was startling: from situations where the school psychologist doubles as counselor, to a counselor caseload of 700 students. Fifty percent reported that counselors also teach the career component of the home and career skills course. In light of these observations and the Regents Action Plan requirements, there appears to be less one-on-one contact *by necessity* between counselors and students. Unfortunately, more personal counseling duties are neglected.

At a time when the incidence of teenage pregnancy, dropouts, suicide and substance abuse threatens the future of young people and their communities, more attention must be given to their social and emotional needs. State mandated academic requirements are only one set of demands to which the educational system must respond. Districts are actively addressing these needs. Fifty-seven percent report special in-house counseling services, 55 percent offer substance abuse counseling. One in three districts uses student resources through peer counseling and dropout prevention programs at the middle grade level. These programs reflect local perceptions of needs. Some districts focus on improving basic skills; others center on vocational training and counseling. New outlets for career counseling, support services and networking must be sought, supported by funding that allows for local discretion. The health of communities and the students themselves demand prompt action.

The Other Worlds of Adolescents: At Home and in the Community

Adolescents are often viewed as a disciplinary problem in the community and referred to mostly when vandalism or other disturbances strike. It is time to share the responsibility for how time out of school is used and build new relationships among schools, youth and communities.

In districts surveyed, 38 percent have programs for parents on adolescent needs and coping skills. Twenty percent use parents as reading partners. Oddly, 58 percent reported *not* having a homework policy. Schools must take an initiative for informing parents of what is avail-

able in school, for them and their child, as well as communicating the goals for the school and students they teach. In a study of middle schooling in Ontario, Canada, parents, staff, administrators, and students agreed that each school principal and staff should develop a program of communication and community involvement. This policy can and should be a priority for New York middle grade schools.

Schools and communities must be aware of mutual needs and concerns to adequately tap resources. A program at P.S. 81 in the Bronx geared for fifth and sixth graders recognizes these needs in an exemplary way. In their "Growing Together" program, isolation of the elderly and the lack of a cohesive, human unit in the lives of students are diminished. Activities including environmental groups, writing workshops, discussion groups, computer lessons, mural painting and performing arts projects are planned for participation by young and old. The result is a "dynamic interaction" between generations. Oddly, organized school-sponsored community outreach programs account for only 28 percent of district initiatives, as reported. The least used community resource is the elderly, and when used, it is in the context of visits to nursing homes and performing home chores.

Communities in cooperation with schools should assess what is available for young adolescents, determine where the gaps are and proceed to plan ways to fill them. The youths themselves should be involved. These young people are capable of explaining their needs for employment, after-school activities, and health related services, and should be encouraged to do so. Successful programs for teenage parents, for instance, depend upon student input for identification of services, both community and school based, which would most effectively meet their needs.

Another method to link community services to students is a directory of private and public agencies. Where there is a lack of health-related knowledge, such a referral tool can make a great difference to a confused child. Likewise, to gain community support, so important to the successful schools we have seen, the school should be open to their concerns, with a mechanism in place to handle them.

Strong links with parents and the community can help adolescents in numerous ways. If there is an effective reporting process and rapport with parents, teachers can more easily discuss developmental concerns. Students are more likely to encourage parents to attend school functions. A laundry list of ways to promote stronger home-community ties include: (1) open houses/parents' nights; (2) community *and* school newsletters; (3) use of parent volunteers; (4) community/parent surveys; (5) direct communiques from the principal; and (6) the expectation for teachers to remain in contact with parents.

Schools cannot single-handedly improve conditions for adolescents, but it is clear that with an understanding of shared responsibility between communities, schools and government, the work can be done.

Conclusion

Schools for adolescents in New York state have developed extensive, unique configurations of academic, extracurricular and community connected learning opportunities and support services. However, sustaining and augmenting promising starts in many districts will be a challenge in the face of continuing potentially expensive implementation of educational reforms.

We are at a juncture. The entire network of organizations that deliver services to youth is under scrutiny. Schools tend to be at the center. It is counterproductive to have separate agencies at local and state levels rethinking and redirecting their efforts toward sometimes duplicative, or conflicting purposes. Educational policymakers should create new opportunities for dialogue, while reassessing services to adolescents and seeking to eliminate program conflicts and overlaps. The process is long overdue.

Appendix A

Commissioner's Regulations

Program Requirements for Students in Grades Seven and Eight

100.4 Program requirements for students in grades seven and eight.

a. Definitions.

(1) *Technology education* means a program of instruction designed to develop an understanding of systems in fields such as production, transportation, construction, communications and agriculture by emphasizing applied activities through working with tools, machines and devices used in the home and the workplace.

(2) *Home and career skills* means a program of instruction primarily through applied activities designed to prepare students to meet their responsibilities and understand their opportunities as parents or other members of families, consumers, home managers and wage earners.

b. Course requirements in grades seven and eight.

(1) Students completing grade eight by June 1986 shall receive instruction in English, social studies, science, mathematics, physical education, health education, visual arts, music and practical arts.

(2) Except as otherwise provided herein, students completing grade eight in June 1987 or thereafter shall have completed, by the end of grade eight, the following required instruction or its equivalent:

(i) English, two units of study;
(ii) social studies, two units of study;
(iii) science, two units of study;
(iv) mathematics, two units of study;
(v) for students completing grade eight in June 1988 or thereafter, technology education, one unit of study;
(vi) for students completing grade eight in June 1988 or thereafter, home and career skills, three quarters of a unit of study;
(vii) physical education, as required by section 135.4(c)(2)(ii) of this Title;
(viii) health education, one half unit of study, as required by section 135.3(c) of this Title;
(ix) art, one half unit of study;
(x) music, one half unit of study;
(xi) for students completing grade eight in June 1988 or thereafter, library and information skills, the

equivalent of one period per week in grades seven and eight.

(3) The requirements for technology education, home and career skills and library and information skills may be met by the integration of the learning outcomes of such subjects into other courses in accordance with the following criteria:

(i) In public schools, the unit of study requirements specified in subparagraphs (2)(v), (vi) and/or (xi) of this subdivision are met.

(ii) In public schools, the subjects of technology education and home and career skills shall be taught by persons certified to teach those subjects.

(iii) In public schools, library and information skills shall be taught by library media specialists and classroom teachers to ensure coordination and integration of library instruction with classroom instruction.

(iv) In nonpublic schools, the unit of study requirements specified in subparagraphs (2)(v), (vi) and/or (xi) of this subdivision may be met, or their equivalents may be met, by the incorporation of the learning outcomes of such subjects into the syllabi for other courses and/or by appropriate results on examinations which demonstrate student mastery of the learning outcomes of such subjects. The chief administrative officer of a nonpublic school shall document the manner in which such non-public school has implemented the provisions of this subparagraph. Such documentation shall be in writing and available for review upon request by the commissioner.

(4) The unit of study requirements for technology education and/or home and career skills included in paragraph (2) of this subdivision may be initiated in grade six, provided that in public schools such subjects shall be taught by teachers certified in those areas.

(5) Students who score below the designed State reference point on any Regents preliminary competency test, specified in paragraph (d)(1) of this section, or on any fifth—or sixth-grade pupil evaluation program test specified in section 100.3(b)(2)(ii) or (iii) of this Part, may have the unit of study requirements for one or more of their subjects reduced, provided that:

(i) remedial instruction shall be coordinated with and supplement regular classroom instruction;

(ii) requirements for subjects set forth in paragraph (2) of this subdivision and for second language instruction set forth in section 100.2(d) of this Part may be reduced but not eliminated. A principal shall consider a student's abilities, skills and interests in determining the subjects for which the unit of study requirements may be reduced;

(iii) a student's parent or guardian shall be notified in writing, by the principal, of a school's intention to

implement the provisions of this paragraph; and

(iv) the exemption shall remain in effect only to the extent that the provisions of subparagraph (i) of this paragraph are being met.

(6) A student may meet the required half unit of study in music specified in subparagraph (2)(x) of this subdivision by participation in a school's band, chorus or orchestra, provided that such participation is consistent with the goals and objectives of the school's music program for grades seven and eight.

(7) The half unit of study requirement for health education specified in subparagraph (2)(viii) of this subdivision may be provided in grade six, provided that in public schools such subject shall be taught by teachers certified in health education.

c. Grade eight acceleration.

(1) No later than September 1986, public school students in grade eight shall have the opportunity to take high school courses in at least four of the following areas: English, social studies, second languages, art, music, occupational education subjects, Regents mathematics courses, Regents science courses. Such opportunity shall be provided subject to the following conditions:

(i) The superintendent, or his or her designee, shall determine whether a student has demonstrated readiness in each subject in which he or she is to begin high school courses in the eighth grade leading either to a local or Regents diploma.

(ii) A student shall be awarded high school credit for such courses only if such student passes one of the following:

(a) for credit towards a Regents diploma, a Regents examination, or an occupational education proficiency examination, or, if no such examinations are available, a locally developed examination which establishes student performance at a high school level as determined by the principal; or

(b) for credit towards a local diploma, a locally developed examination which establishes student performance at a high school level as determined by the principal, or for an occupational education subject, the appropriate occupational education proficiency examination, when available.

(2) Courses taken pursuant to this subdivision may be substituted for the appropriate requirements set forth in subdivision (b) of this section.

d. Required Tests.

At the specified grade level, all students shall take the following tests:

(1) the Regents preliminary competency test in reading administered in grade eight or nine, provided that students who, in grade six, obtained scores at or above the State median on the pupil evaluation program reading test, or at or above

nationwide median on a nationally standardized basic skills reading test administered in grade seven, eight or nine, need not take such test;

(2) the Regents preliminary competency test in writing administered in grade eight or nine, provided that students who, in grade five, obtained scores at or above the State median on the pupil evaluation program writing test, or at or above the nationwide median on a nationally standardized writing test administered in grade six, seven, eight or nine, need not take such test; and

(3) the program evaluation test in social studies in grade eight, beginning in May 1989.

e. **Remedial instruction.**

(1) Students who score below the designated State reference point on one or more of the Regents preliminary competency tests shall be provided appropriate remedial instruction designed to enable them to pass the Regents competency tests specified in section 100.5(a)(4) of this Part by the time they are otherwise qualified to graduate.

(2) A student who shall be provided remedial instruction, and the parent or guardian of such student, shall be notified in writing, by the principal, of the test results and the plan for remedial instruction. Such remedial instruction shall begin no later than the commencement of the school semester immediately following the semester in which the test was administered.

Appendix B

NYSSBA 1986 Survey on Educational Trends in the Middle Grades

Initial Summary of Findings

The New York State School Boards Association conducted a statewide survey in May 1986 to assess the impact of the Regents Action Plan (RAP) on grades seven and eight to find out how school districts are meeting the needs of adolescents. An eight page questionnaire and a project goal statement were mailed to superintendents of all New York state school districts with a request that the material be forwarded to the appropriate building principal. Where a district had more than one facility housing grades seven and eight, we suggested that the form should be completed by the administrator of the school considered typical or representative of the district's educational program. Completed forms were returned by 54 percent (382) of the survey population.

The study showed that in order to comply with the Regents Action Plan and Part 100 of the Commissioner's Regulations, districts have had to make changes in most aspects of education in the middle grades, including physical

plant, curricular and extracurricular offerings and support services.

Following is a summary of survey results for each of 12 areas reported. Interpretation of findings has been kept to a minimum. For further information about the study, contact the NYSSBA Research Office.

I. Background Information

- Housing of middle grades remains primarily in 6 configurations: 5-8, 6-8, 7-8, 7-9, 7-12 and K-12, with 7-12 as the most popular (29 percent) and 6-8 the second most popular (20 percent).
- From the 1984-85 school year to 1986-87, as the Regents Action Plan has been implemented, there has been an increase in the number of instructional periods from 7 to 8 and a 5 minute increase in the average length of the school day, bringing it to 6 hours and 58 minutes (this includes homeroom and lunch). The average length of an instructional period decreased slightly. Sixteen percent of districts anticipated that Action Plan requirements will make a longer school day necessary by 1987-88.
- Twenty-nine percent of responding districts indicated future changes in their physical plants resulting from RAP implementation. These changes include additional classrooms and room conversions to serve different functions.
- Eighty-two percent of the districts reported that they do not have specific written goals or objectives for grades seven and eight, but subject area goals are used widely.

II. Acceleration

- The average proportion of eighth graders who will participate in one or more accelerated programs in 1986-87 is 17 percent. In order of importance, the top four criteria used to allow a student to accelerate are teacher referral, grade average, standardized test scores and parental request.
- As a result of acceleration, 69 percent of school districts said they would experience scheduling difficulties. Also, 11 percent cited increased transportation costs, 25 percent foresaw hiring additional teachers and 38 percent said they would have to purchase additional equipment and materials.

III. Home and Career Skills

- This new course requirement is integrated into another course in 15 percent of reporting districts. Most often, it is accompanied by computer instruction, guidance, business, health, industrial arts or home economics. In 30 percent of districts, the course is available to 6th graders.
- Scheduling difficulties and a need for additional equipment/materials were predicted in 57 percent and 59 percent of districts respectively. Thirty-six percent noted a need for additional teachers.

IV. Technology

- This required course is integrated with another in 11 percent of reporting districts. Science, art, computers, agriculture, industrial arts, library skills and guidance are most often used for this purpose. Twenty-three percent of districts make technology available to sixth graders.
- Additional equipment/materials were reported as future needs by 71 percent of districts. Fifty-seven percent had had or anticipated

scheduling difficulties. Thirty-six percent noted a need for additional teachers.

V. **Second Language**

- During 1985-86, the three most frequently offered second languages in grades seven and eight were French (77 percent), Spanish (76 percent) and Latin (18 percent).
- Thirty-four percent hired additional foreign language teachers in 1985-86, and 43 percent anticipated additional hirings for 1986-87.
- Second language instruction is offered to elementary students in 16 percent of the districts responding, and another 9 percent indicate it will become available.
- Scheduling difficulties and a need for additional equipment/materials were predicted in 57 percent and 59 percent of districts respectively. Thirty-six percent noted a need for additional teachers.

VI. **Music, Art, Health, Library and Information Skills**

- New requirements in music and art will present scheduling difficulties according to 57 percent of responding districts. Forty-three percent noted the need for additional equipment and materials, while 28 percent saw the need for additional teachers.
- The half unit of health requirement is available to 6th graders in 19 percent of reporting districts. It will be available soon in another nine percent.
- Eighty-five percent reported integration of library skills into other courses.

VII. **Remediation**

- The percentages of students in grades seven and eight receiving remediation has remained fairly constant from 1984-85 to estimates for 1986-87. For grade 7, in 1984-85, the percentages of students in remedial math, reading and writing were 20 percent, 26 percent, and 15 percent respectively. In 1986-87, estimated corresponding percentages were 19 percent, 24 percent, and 14 percent. In grade 8, for 1984-85, math, reading and writing remediation were given to 18 percent, 23 percent, and 17 percent of students respectively. Anticipated 1986-87 levels were 18 percent, 22 percent, and 16 percent.
- Students who will have a unit of study reduced to accommodate remediation jumped from 5 percent in grade seven in 1985-86 to 15 percent in 1986-87. Grade eight showed a similar jump, from 4 percent to 13 percent in reporting districts. The five areas noted most frequently for reduction were music (20 percent), art (19 percent), second languages (14 percent), home and career skills (12 percent) and technology (10 percent).
- The number of minutes per week a student typically spends in remediation is 130.

VIII. **Support Services**

- Reporting districts produced an average ratio of guidance counselors to students in grades 7 and 8 at 1:166. The range of answers to this question was particularly broad: from 0 where the school psychologist doubled as counselor, to 1:700.
- Scheduling was ranked as the most important duty of a counselor, followed by communicating with parents, dealing with crises and disseminating career information. Fifty percent reported that the

guidance counselor taught the career segment of home and career skills.

- By percentage of districts indicating availability, special services or programs for 7th and 8th graders were reported as follows: in-school suspension (78 percent), gifted and talented programs (69 percent), intensive counseling (57 percent), substance abuse counseling (55 percent), alternative education programs (40 percent), peer tutoring (31 percent) and attendance improvement programs (30 percent). Seventeen percent reported adolescent pregnancy programs, and 26 percent reported dropout prevention programs.
- Substantial numbers of reporting districts planned to establish or expand various support services. Few forecast reduction or elimination of these programs.

IX. Teaching

- Among the respondents, 13 percent noted that teachers are given a formal role in student advisement programs.
- Less than one percent of teachers in reporting districts were teaching outside of their certification areas in 1985-86.
- The interdisciplinary goals of the RAP are achieved by using student projects (69 percent of reporting districts), team curriculum development (58 percent) and inservice education programs for teachers (41 percent).
- Forty-five percent reported inservice programs targeted to help teachers understand and deal with adolescents.

X. School/Community Activities

- Fifty-eight percent of districts reported *not having* a homework policy.
- Programs to educate parents on adolescent needs were available in 38 percent of responding districts.
- By percentage of districts reporting parental roles, parents participate in schools as committee members (51 percent), classroom volunteers (32 percent), in the Parents as Reading Partners program (20 percent), and in special home-school programs (20 percent).
- School-sponsored community outreach programs were reported in 28 percent of the districts. Programs include student volunteers for community service (19 percent), clean-up campaigns (14 percent), nursing homes (10 percent) and household chores for the elderly (4 percent).

XI. Variances

- Two-thirds of reporting districts determined that they would not need variances for compliance with the Action Plan. Nine percent anticipated applying for a variance or had already applied.
- Reasons to ask for a variance included size of student population, scheduling difficulties and problems with providing required sequences.

XII. Miscellaneous Items

- Districts were asked to identify extracurricular activities offered to seventh and eighth graders, and to indicate in each case whether increased or decreased student participation or elimination were anticipated. Results showed that virtually all districts offer some

extracurricular activities, with band and intramurals, dances and student councils most prevalent.

- Eight of ten responding districts reported no decrease in student rate of extracurricular participation as a result of the Action Plan requirements. In nearly every activity, it was anticipated that student participation would increase rather than decrease.
- Electives offered in the seventh and eighth grades: practical math, reading in the content areas, developmental reading, study skills, public speaking, and cartography.
- Two of every three responding districts said they would *not* eliminate courses in order to implement the RAP; among those who did say yes, about half had already done so. Some of the courses they planned to eliminate: study skills, developmental reading and writing.
- Twenty-three percent of the respondents had seen increased signs of student stress, attitudinal or motivational problems as a result of Action Plan implementation. Another 21 percent did not respond to this item because they felt it was too early to tell.

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